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PROGRAMME, THE ENVIRONMENT FUND AND ADMINISTRATIVE AND OTHER BUDGETARY MATTERS

Functioning of the regional offices and proposed measures for the strengthening of regionalization and decentralization

Report of the Executive Director

Summary

This document, prepared in response to Governing Council decisions 19/31, on strengthening of the regional offices of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and SS.V/1, part II, on UNEP's regional offices, examines the functions of the regional offices and their common core mandates and responsibilities and outlines measures proposed for the strengthening of regionalization and decentralization.

Suggested action by the Governing Council

The Governing Council may wish to:

Welcome the report of the Executive Director on the functioning of the regional offices and proposed measures for the strengthening of regionalization and decentralization;

Take note of the changes made by the Executive Director at UNEP headquarters and in its regional offices in order to strengthen regionalization and ensure that regional priorities are reflected in UNEP's core programme and that UNEP's global programme is reflected in the activities of the regional environmental forums and organizations;

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* UNEP/GC.20/1.

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Request the Executive Director to continue to strengthen regionalization and decentralization, while maintaining the central coordinating role of the Programme's headquarters in Nairobi.

I. REPORT ON THE FUNCTIONING OF UNEP'S REGIONAL OFFICES

A. Introduction

1. UNEP has taken resolute steps to revitalize its regional offices in response to Governing Council decisions 19/1 (the Nairobi Declaration), 19/31 and SS.V/1, part II. In decision 19/31 the Council requested the Executive Director to strengthen the regional offices of UNEP by providing them with appropriate functional and administrative capabilities to enable decentralized implementation of regional environmental programmes and priorities, as developed by regional and subregional ministerial meetings. In decision SS.V/1 the Council urged the Executive Director to work with Governments to establish a common core mandate and set of regional responsibilities and propose adequate allocations for each regional office, while recognizing the specificities of each of the offices. The process of revitalization also constitutes a response to the Nairobi Declaration, which stated that "Regionalization and decentralization should be strengthened through the increased involvement and participation of regional ministerial and other relevant forums in the United Nations Environment Programme process, complementary to the central coordinating role of the Programme's headquarters in Nairobi".

B. Common core mandate and responsibilities of the regional offices

2. UNEP has six regional offices with the overall responsibility to influence environmental policy-setting and implementation in the regions in line with UNEP's global mandate, as approved by the Governing Council, taking into account specific regional needs and priorities. To this end, the regional offices share a number of common functions and responsibilities, as detailed below.

3. The primary role of the regional offices is to represent UNEP and help to present UNEP global policies and enlist support for them in each region. At the same time, the offices bring regional perspectives to the development of UNEP policy and programmes and keep headquarters informed of important developments in the regions.

4. The regional offices assist in the implementation of UNEP's global programmes in the regions, fully utilizing the advantages related to their capacity, location and partnerships.1/ To that end they promote and coordinate regional and subregional cooperation, institutional strengthening and capacity-building, particularly through training and the provision of expertise in the policy, institutional, scientific, technical and legal areas. They also provide substantive and logistic support to region-based UNEP programmes, such as environmental assessment. In the implementation of

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1/ The Regional Office for North America will mainly have a liaison role and will not implement programmes in the same way as the other regional offices.

such activities, the regional offices promote cooperation between UNEP, non-governmental organizations and the private sector. A primary responsibility is to mobilize financial resources for UNEP and its activities in the region, especially for priority activities identified by ministerial and other forums.

5. Programme concentration areas vary from one regional office to another and are shaped by the specific priorities determined by regional environmental and other policy forums. An important part of the work of regional offices is the provision of secretariat functions on request to such regional forums, for example the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment and the Forum of Environment Ministers of Latin America and the Caribbean. The offices also provide advisory services to help Governments translate global commitments into national action for the protection and enhancement of the environment. They also assist in the development of policies and programmes on global and regional environmental issues between and within Governments.

6. The regional offices play an important role in raising public awareness of environmental problems and creating constituencies for environmental action through such activities. They help broaden the constituency for UNEP within the regions.

7. The regional offices, especially those in North America and Europe, also act as liaison offices and promote cooperation and coordination with the rest of the United Nations system as well as with governmental, intergovernmental, non-governmental and private sector agencies in their regions.

C. Proposed allocations for the regional offices

8. Information on the proposed allocations for the regional offices can be found in the "Proposed programme budget of UNEP, revised requirements for 1998-1999 and proposed requirements for 2000-2001" (UNEP/GC.20/22).

9. The UNEP secretariat has initiated action to provide the regional offices with both core staff to carry out their common mandate and regional responsibilities, and outposted staff from other UNEP programmes in areas such as law, industry and assessment. Such staff are budgeted for under the substantive programmes, not the regional office component.

D. Functional and structural relationship between UNEP headquarters and its regional offices

10. The six regional offices are an integral part of UNEP and play a key role in the implementation of UNEP's programme. Along with a small coordinating office in Nairobi, they form the Division of Regional Cooperation and Representation.

11. In order to facilitate enhanced regional delivery, a coordination office has been set up in Nairobi. This office is headed by the Director of the Division of Regional Cooperation and Representation, who is accountable to the Deputy Executive Director and reports through him to the Executive Director. This office is responsible for promoting regional policy

integration and coordinating programme planning. Its key objectives are: to ensure regional perspectives and priorities are adequately reflected in UNEP's global programmes; to help inform major regional environmental policy forums of UNEP priorities; to provide a "one-stop shop" to enable regions to access the headquarters knowledge base and headquarters to access the regional knowledge base for policy-relevant advice and information regarding major regional issues; and to ensure that the regional offices are equipped to meet the priorities expressed in the work programme.

12. While the regional offices work directly with the substantive units in the implementation of the regional sections of the programme, they ensure close liaison with the co-ordinating office in Nairobi to ensure the efficient flow of information and the harmonious implementation of the programme of work.

13. Each regional office is headed by a Regional Director who is responsible for representing UNEP in the region and manages the work and budget of the office. The Regional Directors are members of UNEP's Management Board and participate in the secretariat's ongoing agenda-setting process. They physically attend only a few important Board meetings per year. The Director of the Division of Regional Cooperation and Representation ensures feedback between the regional offices and the Management Board.

14. The regional seas units are an integral part of UNEP's regional programme delivery and help implement both global and regional priorities as appropriate. The Regional Directors will provide political support and representation, and the relevant Division will provide institutional and substantive support to the regional seas programmes. In addition, closer ties will be sought with regional offices and information staff of Habitat to help ensure synergy in programme implementation.

II. MEASURES FOR THE STRENGTHENING OF REGIONALIZATION AND DECENTRALIZATION THROUGH THE INVOLVEMENT OF REGIONAL MINISTERIAL AND OTHER FORUMS

15. Most of the regional offices play an important role in regional forums. Over the next biennium, UNEP proposes to enhance this role further. As the level of involvement by the regional offices in such forums varies greatly between the different regions, proposed measures for the strengthening of regionalization must be region-specific. However, the Latin American and Caribbean Forum of Ministers and Inter-sessional Committee and Inter-Agency Technical Committee detailed below could be used as a model by UNEP and its other regional offices, when and where appropriate, as they strive to strengthen regionalization and decentralization through the involvement of regional ministerial and other forums.

A. Africa

16. The Regional Office for Africa is the secretariat for the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN), the key African intergovernmental body on the environment. AMCEN currently serves as a vehicle for identifying regional programme priorities on the environment, which are used by UNEP in its programming. UNEP will strive to play a greater role in the development of the agenda for AMCEN meetings and assist

AMCEN forums in determining the regional priorities that need to be reflected in UNEP's global programme. Decisions taken at sessions of the OAU Council of Ministers and summits of Heads of State will also continue to guide programming by UNEP, which will provide more substantive inputs to these forums in the coming biennium. UNEP will also become more fully involved in the Secretary-General's initiative on Africa as well as initiatives being pursued by the Economic Commission for Africa, the African Development Bank, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and the Southern African Development Community.

B. Asia and the Pacific

17. Given the size and diversity of the Asia and Pacific region, the Regional Office is actively involved in a number of separate regional forums including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme, the South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme and the Environment Congress for Asia and the Pacific (ECO ASIA). The Regional Office also provides a chairperson for the Environment and Natural Resources Subcommittee of the Regional Inter-Agency Committee for Asia and the Pacific. In addition, UNEP and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific convene a joint ministerial meeting every five years, and a King Bhumibol Trust Fund has been mooted to support ministerial meetings on a biennial basis, drawing some lessons from the experience in Latin America.

C. Europe

18. In Europe there are a multitude of ministerial and other environmental forums. The Regional Office plans to further expand and strengthen its cooperative links with Governments and relevant intergovernmental and non-governmental forums, to highlight global environmental issues of priority to UNEP in environment and development forums and to represent the Executive Director in forums such as the Economic Commission for Europe, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development and the European Union.

D. Latin America and the Caribbean

19. The UNEP regional office in Latin America and the Caribbean serves as the secretariat for the Forum of Environment Ministers of Latin America and the Caribbean. This forum usually meets once every two years; its limited-membership Inter-Sessional Committee meets in between the full sessions. These two bodies help UNEP to identify priorities for the region, reach positions of common interest regarding major items on the global environmental agenda, and match UNEP global priorities with the specific needs of the region. UNEP's involvement in the Forum is very active, enabling it to seek guidance and harness the support of the ministers for its programme of work in the region. An Inter-Agency Technical Committee, made up of UNEP, the United Nations Development Programme and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), is responsible for designing projects and seeking funding to help implement the decisions of the Forum, especially the regional action plan. Partnerships with other organizations, such as the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and the World Bank, will be sought so as to broaden the membership of the Technical Committee (see annex for more details).

E. West Asia

20. In West Asia, the Regional Office will strive to forge closer links with the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (CAMRE), and its secretariat at the League of Arab States. The Arab programme for sustainable development, prepared under the auspices of CAMRE, has guided and will continue to guide UNEP activities in the region, bearing in mind UNEP's global priorities. UNEP will also forge closer links with the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Arab Gulf Programme for the United Nations Development Organizations.

Annex

Institutional mechanisms and regional action plan for the strengthening of the Forum of Environment Ministers of Latin America and the Caribbean

A. Institutional mechanisms

1. The Forum of Environment Ministers of Latin America and the Caribbean, in its capacity as the highest body, will have the following functions, taken from the decisions of the ninth and eleventh meetings of Ministers:

(a) To analyse, seek concerted agreement, assess and follow up on matters of importance to sustainable development within its sphere of competence;

(b) To provide guidance for and assess regional cooperation in environmental matters within the context of sustainable development;

(c) To assess, discuss and reach concerted agreement on regional positions concerning items on the international environmental agenda;

(d) To consider international financing issues linked to the implementation of Agenda 21 commitments in the region;

(e) To evaluate the fulfilment of agreements and objectives of previous ministerial meetings;

(f) To approve the Action Plan for four years, based on the proposal submitted to it for consideration by the Inter-Sessional Committee;

(g) To formulate specific mandates for the Inter-Sessional Committee to implement the projects approved for the first biennium, and to prepare the project proposals that should be submitted to it at its next meeting;

(h) To provide guidance for and assess UNEP activities in Latin America and the Caribbean in the terms established in the decisions adopted by the Governing Council of UNEP.

2. The Inter-Sessional Committee, being the body entrusted with the task of following up the decisions of the Meeting of Ministers and of presenting and promoting the interests of the region in the various forums of the international system, will have the following functions, taken from the decisions of the ninth and eleventh meetings of Ministers:

(a) To submit a regional action plan proposal for the following four-year period to the Forum of Ministers for consideration;

(b) To take all pertinent steps, in accordance with the mandates formulated by the Forum, to implement the projects approved for the first biennium, and provide for their follow-up;

(c) To conduct all the necessary consultations and activities to identify the topics and prepare project profiles identified as being of priority at the next meeting of the Forum of Ministers, so that a decision may be reached on which projects should be developed in greater depth, in the terms indicated in the previous paragraph;

(d) To take all the necessary measures to prepare the project proposals to be submitted at the following meeting of the Forum of Ministers, so that the projects may be implemented in the subsequent biennium;

(e) To follow up the application of the agreements adopted by the meetings of Ministers and review their participation in other pertinent meetings and forums;

(f) To propose the principal objectives of the forthcoming Meeting of Ministers and assess the activities conducted up to that time;

(g) To make recommendations concerning the need to take actions important to fulfilling the decisions of the Meeting of Ministers and the UNEP programme in the region.

3. The Inter-Sessional Committee will identify and select priority topics and projects on the basis of the following criteria:

(a) They should respond to common concerns or priority regional problems identified by the Forum of Ministers;

(b) They should fall within the spheres of competence of the environment ministers;

(c) They should be able to produce economic and social benefits;

(d) They should not duplicate the efforts of other agencies;

(e) They should contribute added value to the related activities being carried out in the region;

(f) There should be possibilities of financing them.

4. UNEP will provide secretariat support to the work of the meetings of the Environment Ministers, through its Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, and will have the following functions in relation to the Regional Action Plan:

(a) To coordinate and develop all the activities required to enable both the Forum of Ministers and the Inter-Sessional Committee to fulfil the functions listed above;

(b) To coordinate the activities of the Inter-Agency Technical Committee referred to below.

5. The Inter-Agency Technical Committee, coordinaced by UNEP, will initially be formed by UNDP and IDB, as well as any other international agencies that wish to form part of it and are considered pertinent to its work by the Forum. The Committee will have the following functions:

(a) To present options for implementing the programme decisions adopted by the Forum in relation to the Regional Action Plan;

(b) To conduct activities aimed at obtaining technical assistance for project design and development;

(c) To conduct activities aimed to identifying potential sources of funding for the projects;

(d) To coordinate the activities of the participating agencies in relation to items on the priority agenda of the Forum;

(e) To set up the Ad hoc Working Groups referred to below, as necessary.

6. National focal points. The national focal points designated by the Environment Ministries or equivalent entities will have the following functions to enable them to interact with the UNEP Regional Office and, when appropriate, with IDB and UNDP:

(a) To serve as a liaison with the Secretariat;

(b) To ensure country-level coordination of the processes required for project preparation and follow-up and, in general, all activities necessary for the operation of the Forum and design and implementation of the Regional Action Plan.

7. The above-mentioned Ad hoc Working Groups will be composed of experts from Governments, the United Nations system, international agencies, the private sector, non-governmental organizations and the Secretariat. Their composition and size will be determined in accordance with the nature of the projects. These ad hoc groups may invite representatives of multilateral banks, regional and global environment funds and donor Governments to participate in them, as well as other international entities, in order to create favourable conditions for project funding and implementation. Each ad hoc group will have a coordinating entity, which will ideally be UNEP, IDB or UNDP, at least during the stage of project initiation. The Ad hoc Working Groups will have the following functions:

(a) To support the Inter-Sessional Committee in preparing project profiles or more detailed proposals for those projects;

(b) To support the Inter-Sessional Committee in the implementation and follow-up of projects incorporated into the Regional Action Plan.

B. Regional Action Plan

8. As a tool for implementing the above-mentioned functions, the Forum of Environment Ministers will have a Regional Action Plan that includes the following elements:

(a) Priority environmental topics of regional interest;

(b) Project profiles for each of the priority topics, broken down into problem areas, lines of action, possible machinery for cooperation and sources of financing. In keeping with the functions of the Forum of Ministers, the projects may be aimed at the exchange of experience on environmental problems common to the countries or at solving multinational problems at the regional or subregional level;

(c) Two working time-frames of two years each, for the next four years.